Discussing "The Problem of the Pacific"

SHALL any of the possessions held by Germany in the Pacific be restored to that Power? This is the question considered in *The Problem of the Pacific*, by Mr. Charles Brunsdon Fletcher, a prominent Australian journalist, who vigorously advocated the federation of the Australian colonies, as editor of the Brisbane *Courier* in Queensland, and who has been associate editor of the Sydney *Morning Herald* since 1903. As might be expected, the author discusses the problem from an Australian point of view, but his book is none the less interesting on that account, as it reveals no trace of provincialism, but rather the carefully thought out conclusions of a scholarly student of world politics, enlightened by a varied experience of life and extensive travel.

There is a preface by Sir William MacGregor, who, without any disparagement of the author, may be described as a more remarkable man. It is often said that a British boy in modern times, unless favored by birth or influence, has no such chance of advancement in life as is enjoyed by the poorest American youth; but this notion is contradicted by Sir William MacGregor's career. Born in Scotland, of plain people, he studied medicine and began to earn his living as a medical practitioner at Glasgow, where he became resident physician and surgeon at the Royal Infirmary. His first Government appointment was in the line of his profession, being the position of medical officer in the Seychelles, a group of islands in the Indian Ocean belonging to Great Britain, remarkable as the only granitic islands in the tropics. Thence he was transferred to Mauritius as surgeon of the Civil Hospital at Port Louis, and from Mauritius he went to the Fiji Islands in 1875, as chief medical officer under the colonial government.

By this time his administrative abilities had become so manifest that his services were demanded in a different field, and he relinquished medicine for politics. His first political office was that of High Commissioner of the Western Pacific. Thereafter his public life was a series of successive promotions, as follows: Administrator of British New Guinea and subsequently Lieutenant-Governor of that colony; Governor of Lagos, in West Africa; Governor of Newfoundland, and finally Governor of the Australian colony of Queensland, which office he held until his retirement from the public service. Meantime, he had been made a Privy Councillor of Great Britain, a Grand Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George and had received honorary degrees from the universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

This is doing pretty well for a modest Aberdeen medical student. His experience in the Pacific islands and New Guinea qualify him exceptionally to judge of the merits of Mr. Fletcher's book.

II.

Australia is so largely dependent upon the trade of the Pacific that Australians may justly claim a paramount right among citizens of the British Empire to be heard in reference to the future distribution of power over the Pacific possessions of Germany. They present what seems to us a conclusive argument against their restoration to German rule.

All possibility of this is doubtless now past; though some doubt may still have existed when Mr. Fletcher was writing his book. "The only way to make the Pacific safe," says Sir William MacGregor in his preface, "will be to keep political Germany out of it." He concedes that under the British flag, "which outside the fatherland he prefers to his own," the German, taken as an individual, has been a good colonist in the Pacific; the German merchant is described as a well educated and pleasant man who can be thoroughly trusted in business, and of the German scientist it is said that he has contributed his fair share to our stock of knowledge of the Pacific; but in one characteristic they are declared to be all alike: "They are all ready for a military expedition against their neighbors and for booty." Indeed, Sir William MacGregor doubts whether Germany could be kept in hand in the Pacific or anywhere else, even if enrolled in the proposed League of Nations.

"A League of Nations may well serve a temporary purpose, but the natural history of man, especially of the German, makes one doubt that such a combination can be permanent." The fact is recalled that Prince Hohenlohe, who was regarded as one of the most honorable of modern German statesmen, when he had a British gunboat placed at his disposal to take him around the shores of the Levant, studied on the voyage how Germany could acquire Cyprus and check the influence of the English in Syria and Asia Minor.

Sir William MacGregor's estimate of the German merchant in the Pacific as thoroughly trustworthy in business is radically different from the unfavorable opinion in regard to the German merchant entertained in South America by those Englishmen and Americans best acquainted with the deceptive practices to which they constantly resort in such centres of trade as Buenos Ayres, Montevideo and Rio Janeiro.

III.

Although the Pacific Ocean, considered in its greatest extent, ranges through 180 degrees of longitude and nearly 180 degrees of latitude, Mr. Fletcher says that to most Europeans it has hardly been better known than the dark side of the moon. Since the middle of the nineteenth century its shores, continental islands and smaller islands have been dominated chiefly by four forces—Great Britain, the United States and Japan, acting in substantial unity to promote the cause of liberty, and Germany, generally hostile to freedom—so hostile, indeed, that she had to be subdued to the uttermost if the world was to be worth living in.

As a result of the great war the German Pacific colonies have been placed under provisional administration by the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand, and assuming that they are never to be returned to Germany—which may be regarded as a tolerably safe assumption—a secondary problem of the Pacific is how they are to be governed in the future. Whatever form of administration may be adopted, Sir William MacGregor says, there are British officers in Australasia competent to carry it out. In his judgment the question of financial support for the several Governments that may be set up is likely to prove more difficult. New Zealand is ready and willing to provide for her share of the expense, but Australia, it seems, is inclined to place a portion of the burden at least upon the Imperial Government in England.

One objection to the extension of Australian governmental methods to other colonial possessions is the failure of Australian statesmanship always to deal most effectively and satisfactorily with the problems of the Commonwealth itself; but Mr. Fletcher is confident that "when the time comes Australia will prove herself quite capable of large responsibilities and serious sacrifices; but she will require the patience given to strong limbed, vigorous youngsters intent upon reading the world their own way."

No other Australian has done more than Mr. William M. Hughes, the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, who recently visited the United States, toward the solution of present day problems in the Pacific; and it would have been satisfactory to have had an estimate of the character and achievements of this statesman from a journalist like Mr. Fletcher, whose judgments of prominent Australians in public life must be acceptable to a large constituency of newspaper readers. All that we are told concerning the Prime Minister, however, is that he would not face the threatened peril of martial law and civil war for the sake of forcing compulsory military service upon the Australian people; but, on the other hand, that "one of the ablest and wisest of Australian publicists thinks that Mr. Hughes saved the Commonwealth from revolution by turning to the referendum," though the referendum was bound to fail.

The end of the war has made the question academic; and Mr. Hughes can point with pride to the fact that Australia contributed 330,000 men to the British armies, of whom 57,000 laid down their lives in defence of civilization against German aggression. Indeed, there were more Australians in the single battle of Pozieres than there were British soldiers under Wellington at Waterloo.

IV.

In commenting upon the importance of the Panama Canal to the mastery of the Pacific, Mr. Fletcher attributes the obstacles which President Roosevelt had to overcome largely to Teutonic intrigue in the republic of Colombia, just as Germany has always been at the bottom of all the false alarms about war between Japan and this country, as was pointed out by that accomplished American traveller and observer, the late Price Collier, nearly ten years ago. The prominence of Panama to-day in the problems of the Pacific reminds the author that Sir Francis Drake, an Englishman, was the first of his countrymen to set sail upon the largest of the earth's oceans, after he had descried its waters from the branches of a tree on the Isthmus. Many of our readers will recall the gorgeous lines of Alfred Noyes describing what happened

"When on the highest ridge of that strange land
Under the cloudless, blinding tropic blue,
Drake and his band of swarthy seamen stood
With dazed eyes, gazing round them."

They had halted upon the verge of an undiscovered world of waters of whose existence the earth they knew had given them no hint.

"In front they could not see
What lay beyond the ridge. Only they heard
Cries of the painted birds troubling the heat
And shivering through the woods; till Francis Drake
Plunged through the bush, took hold upon a tree,
The tallest near them, and clomb upward, branch
By branch.

"And there as he swung clear above
The steep down forest on his wondering eyes,
Mile upon mile of rugged, shimmering gold,
Burst the unknown, immeasurable sea.
Then he descended; and with a new voice
Vowed that, God helping, he would one day plough
Those virgin waters with an English keel."

While the prevailing tone of *The Problem of the Pacific* is serious, as such a book should be, it is diversified by anecdotes and incidents illustrative or explanatory of the particular matter under discussion. The compromise of the Oregon dispute in 1846 gave Puget Sound to the United States and what is now British Columbia to Great Britain. Mr. Fletcher thinks that Puget Sound would still be British if England had appreciated its importance and pressed her claim more insistently.

The story is that one Capt. Gordon of the royal navy was sent to observe and report upon the probable value of Puget Sound to Great Britain. "The Captain went ashore to make a supreme test. He wanted to see if the salmon in those waters would rise to his flies! They declined the British flies; and because they would not rise he reported against the country," thus losing for the Dominion of Canada and the British Empire one of the finest harbors in the world.

To show how far from autocratic were the original ideals animating the sentiment for German unity among the German people, the author quotes this remarkable statement from Hermann Fernau's latest book: "It is strange that the song 'Deutschland über Alles' was first sung in Hamburg, on the occasion of a manifestation in favor of the liberty of the press."

V.

It is manifest that the future of the Pacific is largely dependent upon the political and social welfare of Australia; and Mr. Fletcher recognizes that there has been grave cause for disquietude on account of the radical tendencies of a strong element in the Labor party of the Commonwealth. He is confident, however, that the counsels of wisdom will ultimately prevail in dealing with the perplexing problems that beset his country, and the Pacific will be blessed with the peace that its name imports.

His book is a most helpful contribution to the understanding of an important subject. It is a curious fact, however, that in such a work there should be no mention of the interests of South America, although the Pacific Ocean washes the western coast of that continent from the Isthmus of Panama to the Straits of Magellan.

THE PROBLEM OF THE PACIFIC. By C. BRUNSDON FLETCHER. Henry Holt & Co. $3.

Conan Doyle's War History

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S *A History of the Great War* has now reached its fourth volume, which is devoted to the British campaign in France and Flanders in 1917, culminating in "the dramatic twofold battle of Cambrai." Sir Arthur begins this portion of what is really becoming a "monumental history" so far as bulk is concerned, with Hindenburg's retreat along the Arras-Soissons front, the advance of the Fourth and Fifth armies, the capture of Bapaume and Perrone, all this leading up to the battle of Arras of April 9-23, 1917. He follows along through the operations in the Arras sectors after the battle proper; gives a chapter to the battle of Messines that opened with Plumer's blowing up of the great mines so long in the making, and follows this with four chapters, running to seventy pages in all, given to the third battle of Ypres that began on July 31 and continued until November 10. Two chapters picturing the battle of Cambrai, where the tanks made their appearance for the first time in the war, brings this volume to its end.

Of this engagement which began so brilliantly for the British—how the allied world thrilled at Byng's success in the beginning!—and ended so lamely Doyle writes: "So ended the swaying fortunes of this hard fought and dramatic battle, beginning with a surprise attack of the British upon the Germans and ending by an attack of the Germans upon the British, which, if not a surprise to the commanders, at least produced some surprising and untoward results.

"The balance of these varied actions was greatly in favor of the British, and yet it could not be denied that something of the glory and satisfaction of Byng's splendid original victory were dimmed by this unsatisfactory epilogue, which was only made less disastrous to the British cause by the very heavy losses which their enemy incurred upon the northern sector." One may well wonder if a British historian studying this battle fifty years from now will take as much comfort as Doyle does out of those "very heavy losses" that were so little comfort to us at the beginning of December, 1917?

In his scheme of telling the history of the war Sir Arthur seems to have agreed to make the western front of chief importance, for in the first chapter of this volume he gives only a page to summarizing the work of Gen. Maude in Mesopotamia and of the beginning of the campaign across the Sinai Desert that was to end so brilliantly in the taking of Jerusalem from the Turk. He makes a brief reference to the German submarine campaign that brought us into the war at last, but he makes a conspicuous slip in stating the United States formally declared war on April 5, the real date being the following day.

Of the general results of the year 1917 Doyle says: "It is certain, however, that this year marked the period in which the Allies gained a definite military ascendency over the German forces, in spite of the one great subsequent rally which had its source in events which were beyond the control of the western Powers."

Doubtless he means the Russian situation by this, but with Lloyd George's famous speech after the German drive of March, 1918, began still fresh in the memory this reviewer feels that Conan Doyle is trying to shift the blame to shoulders other than those Britons who stood out so long against a united command, the one thing, together with America's aid, that won the war on land for the Allies.

A HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR: VOLUME FOUR: THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS. By SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE. George H. Doran Company. $2.50.